

MAOR TO ADDRESS EMANUEL

Battle for converts

PETER KOHN

PROSPECTIVE olim whose Israeli Reform and Conservative conversions have been recognised by the country's Supreme Court for citizenship under the Law of Return are watching the outcome of last month's election nervously.

They fear ultra-Orthodox religious parties could jeopardise the landmark March ruling, said Nicole Maor (pictured), an Israeli lawyer and former Sydneysider.

Speaking to *The AJN* at the start of a visit to Australia, Maor – the director of the Legal Aid Centre for Olim (LACO) – predicted Charedi parties would try to override the ruling from the Knesset.

She said the Supreme Court had not ruled on an existing law regarding Jewish status, so ultra-Orthodox parties forming a coalition with Benjamin Netanyahu could legislate to override the decision, and even to veto court decisions in general, which would help the Prime Minister with his legal woes.

Israel's highest court had not definitively ruled on Israeli non-Orthodox conversions until this year, although the issue exploded in the 1990s with the Soviet influx.



The March judgement extended the court's 2005 ruling legitimising non-Orthodox conversions outside Israel, said Maor, which had been a legal nicety, as these conversions had a significant study component undertaken in Israel.

But LACO and the Israel Reform Action Centre persevered for an unambiguous ruling on Israeli conversions.

“One of the reasons the Supreme Court waited for 15 long years was because they wanted the Knesset to pass a law and keep the hot potato in the Knesset, rather than passing that to the Supreme Court,” she said. But the court finally issued a ruling outside any legislative framework.

LACO is active in the Ethiopian community, having representing 100,000 olim barred from citizenship because they are not deemed Jewish, often for lack of documentation, sometimes dividing families.

Having grown up in Sydney's Progressive community and serving as a Netzer leader, Maor studied law and made aliyah in the 1990s. She reflected, “The ultimate goal of a Reform Zionist was to go to Israel and make it a better place.”

Nicole Maor will address Emanuel Synagogue on Tuesday, April 27, at 7pm. Bookings: upj.org.au/progressive-appeal/campaign-events